

REMARKS

Claims 1-18, 52-63, and 73-74 are pending. Applicant has amended claims 10, 52, 58, 62, 63 and 73 to correct typographical errors and added claim 74.

Applicant would like to thank the Examiner for his consideration during the telephone interview of December 27, 2005. During that interview, applicant's representative described Gautier's technique for creating viewer accounts. As described below in more detail, Gautier creates viewer accounts at a set-top box by storing a user identifier ("UID") at the set-top box. A viewer account also has a personal identification number. When a user logs on to a set-top box using a personal identification number, the set-top box retrieves the UID stored locally for the viewer account and sends the UID to a cable operator computer to identify the user to the cable operator. Thus, Gautier never encounters the situation in which a set-top box sends a UID for an account that is not already associated with or stored at the set-top box.

The Examiner has rejected claims 16-18 under 35 U.S.C. § 102(e) as being anticipated by Gautier and claims 1-15, 52-63, and 73 under 35 U.S.C. § 103(a) as being unpatentable over Gautier in view of Hagan. Applicant respectfully traverses these rejections.

Gautier describes two techniques for creating accounts: one for owner accounts and the other for child accounts.

The first technique creates an owner account as illustrated by Figure 2A and 2B of Gautier. When a person wants to subscribe to a network service, the person contacts the operator ("MSO") of the network service (e.g., via a telephone call) and registers. The operator's computer creates a subscriber record containing a registration code along with the person's name, address, and so on. The operator gives the registration code to the person. After a set-top box ("ASTB") is installed at the person's home, the person starts the set-top box to establish a connection to the operator computer. The set-top box then

displays a member services screen through which the person enters the registration code. The set-box sends the registration code to the operator computer. The operator computer uses the registration code to retrieve the subscriber record that was created when the person registered. Since the operator computer now knows that the set-top box is associated with the subscriber record, it creates a network account for the person that is identified by a network identifier ("NID"). The operator computer also creates a user identifier ("UID") and maps the UID to the network account. The operator computer sends the UID along with other information to the set-top box. The set-top box creates a viewer account locally that includes the UID. The viewer account apparently has a personal identification number, separate from the UID, that is entered by the person to log on to the viewer account. The UID is unique to the person, but not known to the person.

When the person wants to use a service, the person enters their personal identification number, which is used by the set-top box to identify the viewer account at the set-top box. The set-top box retrieves the UID from the viewer account and forwards it to the operator computer. The operator computer can map the UID to an NID and then retrieve the person's network account using the NID.

The second technique creates a child account as illustrated by Figure 5 of Gautier. A person wanting to create a child account logs on to their existing viewer account at a set-top box and indicates to create a child account. The set-top box creates a child viewer account at the set-top box, apparently with a personal identification number. The UID of the child viewer account is initially empty. A person who wants to use the child viewer account logs on to the set-top box using the personal identification number. When the person tries to access a network service, the operator computer detects that the UID is empty and directs the person to create a new network account or to bind the child viewer account to an existing network account.

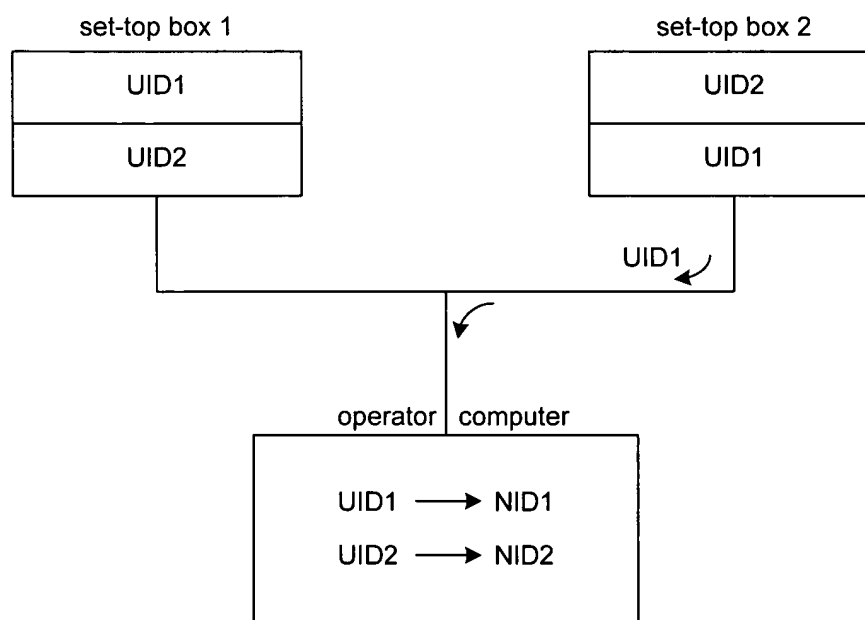
If the person does not have an existing network account, the person enters appropriate information and the operator computer creates a new network account with a

new NID. The operator computer also creates a new UID, maps the UID to the network account, and then provides the UID to the set-top box. Upon receiving the UID, the set-top box associates the UID with the child viewer account.

If the person has an existing network account, then the person provides an identification of the network account and authentication information. The operator computer presumably retrieves the NID for the network account and then retrieves the mapped UID. The operator computer then sends the UID to the set-top box for storing in the child viewer account.

According to Gautier, each person has only one UID and only one NID. Each person may have multiple viewer accounts at different set-top boxes that each stores that person's UID. Each person, however, has only one network account that is identified by the NID and includes a mapping to the person's UID.

To illustrate the differences between Gautier and the claimed invention, assume that someone has used Gautier to set up two set-top boxes as shown below:



Set-top box1 has two viewer accounts with UID1 and UID2, and set-top box2 also has two viewer accounts with UID1 and UID2. UID1 maps to the network account with NID1, and UID2 maps to the network account with NID2.

Applicant's claims 1-9 recite "receiving by the computer a request from the second node that includes the first user identifier." An analogous step would occur in Gautier when a user logs on to the viewer account associated with UID1 at set-top box2. After log on, set-top box2 would send to the operator computer UID1 as indicated by the arrows.

Claims 1-9, however, also recite that "when the first account is not already associated [with] the second node," the next two steps are performed. Gautier never encounters the situation in which the operator computer receives such a request that is a request in which the first account (UID1) is not already associated with the second node (set-top box2). This simply cannot happen in Gautier because the only way that a set-top box can send a UID to the operator computer is if the network account (and viewer account) is already associated with the set-top box.

As such, Gautier neither teaches nor suggests the performing of steps "when the first account is not already associated with the second node."

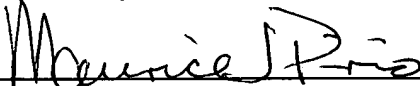
All the other claims similarly recite receiving an account identifier or information and, when an account is not associated with the computer that sent the account identifier, taking some action (e.g., combining accounts). Claims 10-15 and 52-63 recite "when the account to which the information is related is not currently associated with the node." Claims 16-18 recite "when the received account identifier does not match an account identifier previously stored at the node." Claim 73 recites the "when the received account identifier does not match an account identifier previously cached at the client computer." Thus, each of the claims describes this circumstance for taking an action that is neither taught nor suggested by Gautier. Newly added claim 74 recites the combining of accounts created at the request of different users when a first user logs on using a second node,

rather than a first node, which is neither taught nor suggested by Gautier. Moreover, each of the claims recites a novel combination of elements that is not suggested by the cited reference.

Based upon these remarks and amendments, applicant respectfully requests reconsideration of this application and its early allowance. If the Examiner has any questions or believes a telephone conference would expedite prosecution of this application, the Examiner is encouraged to call the undersigned at (206) 359-8548.

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Respectfully submitted,

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